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Idioms for our time

By Joseph Epstein

WILLIAM and MARY MORRIS (with the Assistance of a Panel of 136 Distinguished Consultants on Usage):
Harper Dictionary of Contemporary Usage
650pp. Harper and Row. \$15.

The battle for good usage is the best of all lost causes. For one thing, the company is so good. Entered in its lists over the centuries have been Confucius, Cervantes, Swift, Dr Johnson, and, to jump to our own day, George Orwell and Edmund Wilson. All have fired their shots, with Swift, writing to his prime minister about the growing imperfection of the English language, heaving this characteristic stand:

that [the language's] daily improvements are by no means in proportion to its daily corruptions; that the pretenders to polish and refine it have chiefly multiplied abuses and absurdities; and that in many instances it offends against every part of

If Swift was offended by the deterioration of language in the eighteenth century, what would he have made of the further depredations of the twentieth? A very great deal, doubtless. Yet the complaints Swift lodged in his time and those he might lodge in ours would be in substance, probably, be much the

abound. Good taste and common sense are everywhere outraged. The Goths are at the gates. If things continue as they have been going, can only be a brief time before we shall no longer be speaking but instead shall take to grunting to each other. *Après nous le déluge*. All true, except for the apocalyptic aspect, for life, as heedless of the niceties of language as it is of the niceties of justice, will of course go on—but considerably lessened in its intelligibility, even more witless

Tolerance, moderation, sweet reason, everywhere else rightly deemed virtues, have no place in the battle for good usage. Negotiation in this battle makes no sense; those who stand for the careful selection and deployment of words

are too greatly outnumbered. Their charging hordes, with words like "ongoing" dripping from their lips will not be turned back. Their "needs", as they might put it, will be met. Their "support structures" are too strong for them to be loosed. Hence the dispensability of the traditional virtues. Extremism in the defence of good usage, paraphrase Senator Barry Goldwater, is no vice; moderation in the contempt for bad no virtue.

Certainly there seems no reason for any lessening of alarm in the present, either in Britain or the United States. Was it Shuman who described the two nations as "one people divided by a common language"? We are every day being brought closer together, now, jargon and general obscurity being the cement uniting us. Still, we in the United States are

States continue to enjoy a lead of a few furlongs—with British science coming up fast on the outside—in the debasement-of-language sweepstakes. If American language can sometimes be more colorful and inventive than British, it is just as often more hideous and empty. "When Americans are done with

the English language", the humorist Finley Peter Dunne wrote, "it would look as if it had been run over by a musical comedy." A musical comedy shouldn't be so bad—one that hums a few laughs, leaves the theatergoer humming a tune—but at present the English language in the United States is beginning to look more like it had been taken over by a musical research conference. In many of its current strains, American usage features the pompous at the service of the mundane, the cumbersome in the cause of the confusing.

Understanding usage in the sense of standards of correctness, the very term American Usage seems a little thing of an oddity. The two words seem to resist confining to the magnets of similar pole. As we use the terms honest, used-car dealer, and candid politician, they do quite lock comfortably together. There are in fact so many American usages. What L. L. Dillard records

Involved as well is that in the United States social class and the use of language have not been so intimately joined as in Britain. "Money talks," an American adage perhaps explains the point more efficiently than an elaborate analysis of why this has been so. Viewed more charitably, the democratic spirit in the United States has been very much against the hardening of class lines by accent or by the careful selection of language.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt was the first president of the United States to speak in the accents of the American upper classes—and one might add, was hated most of all by members of those classes. In those days, in those accents nothing but the note of betrayal. Firmly laying down the law on usage apparently uncontentious to white lawyers, he called the vulgarisms "Common" and "vulgar" and those poisoned arrows in the quiver of the language lawyer, in the easiest shot in the target of the common man. The common and vulgar are often—commonly and vulgarly—lauded by American linguists. Can Native Speakers of the language be expected to read the title of a speech given to a meeting of the Linguistic Society of America in 1964, and the answer to it? They would be puzzled by the word "vulgar" and by the word "Common."

Good books on American usage have indeed been written—*The American Usage Guide* by Lester K. Born, *The American Usage and Grammar* by John L. Murray, and *The American Usage and Grammar* by John L. Murray. But the figure comparable to H. W. Fowler is not so handy likely to have been written. The land of usage is the bond of tangled syntax, opaque phrasing, and blurring meaning. The tone of confidence, authority, so handsomely at the disposal of Fowler, is not so easily to Americans—it does not, in fact, come at all. In the introduction to their *Harper Dictionary of Contemporary Usage*, William Morris and Morris Morris assure that they "make every effort not to be dogmatic and, as a matter of fact, not dictatorial." It is a reassurance they make because they also realize the principal cause for the workers' war on the


What, after all, is wrong about being dogmatic and dictatorial in questions of usage? Henry Fowler could be both, though, as is so sometimes forgotten, he was, in his time, a radical dogmatist, a dictator for reform. As Sir Ernest Gowers has reminded us:

I am, of course, old enough to remember the publication of *Modern English Usage*. I think that most of us then hailed the book as a revelation, and that the sweetest was the cobwebbed grammarians' fetichism. It was refreshing to be told by a fellow writer that what we had taken for different could only be a gloss from was a superstition, to insist on the same prepositional case as did the Latin. There was one of the pedantries to spring from little knowledge. It was better to split one's index than to make a list of artificial, that to apply one's index to the expression under the compunctious was puerile, that was to be a pedant. The pedant ought not to begin a sentence with *and* or *but*, or to end with a preposition, that the *and* and *but* were the *and* of the adverb only are

The true meaning of idiosyncrasy is peculiar mixture, and the point of it is best shown in the words that describe Brutus: "His life was gentle, and the elements so mixed in him that Nature might stand up And say to all the world 'This was a man.'" One's idiosyncrasy is the way one's elements are mixed. . . .

The elements mixed in Fowler were a love of precision and clarity such that it could not possibly be misunderstood along with a longing for affection, regressiv, and humor.

the lot leavened by an irresistible sense of humour that could not be restrained even in an article on the intransitive past participle. Fowler was not without weakness. His own



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William and Mary Morris, on the other hand, are a couple. More than a mere couple, they are the heads of a 136-member panel—of "prominent writers, editors, public speakers, educators, and commentators"—who have added their in the compilation of the *Harper Dictionary of Contemporary Usage*. The definition of democracy is at work in their book; the elements are more well mixed. Mr and Mrs Morris

and their panel have a great many opinions, but taken together they do not add up to a point of view. They composed their book, they told us, on the assumption that "the di-

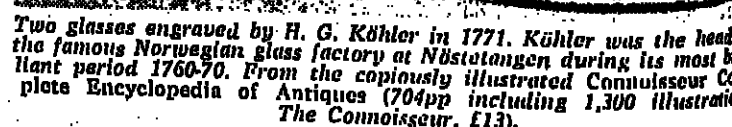
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The Harper Dictionary of Contemporary Usage is not a dreadfully uninteresting book—merely a dreadfully undistinguished one. It is undistinguished because it is so sure of itself. It is packed with a generous majesty of information, but devoid of any sense of charm or character. By turns it is snobbish, condescending, a little too much in evidence, and so on, so that it occasionally bites its own hand that, surely, it wishes to feed it. On their entry "concrete," for example, the Morris comments that this word is "a favorite of business men and other semi-literates." Given the rudimentary nature of many of their other entries—among them pronunciation entries on the words "conglomerations," "conglomerate," "collocation," and "collocative"—it is not surprising to have thought that business administrators, bureaucrats, and other semi-literates made up precisely the readership at which their book is

Having it both ways, though, is the mark of the middlebrow creation and a middlebrow creation is *Harper Dictionary of Contemporary Usage* preeminently is. (The book contains no entry on "middlebrow.")



izes

in the sixteenth century by a Free City of the Holy Roman Empire; but it was also the only Protestant one in southern Germany, and served the higher education needs of a town that was by then not only prosperous and proud of itself, but also an epitome of German Renaissance culture. Nuremberg, home of Dürer and Hans Sachs and his Masteringers, was also a place of countless erudite and acquisitive scholars, merchants and book publishers. Questions about this kaleidoscope of emblematic devices and semantic details. Why the arts in the first place? What is their purpose, and how should they be taught? These were the questions that the earlier speakers had been streaming? Why grades and honours? Why academic privilege and distinctions? And, later, can learning and research be taught? These are a burning question which is directly to the

learn their powers of argument and their Latin by reading Cicero and come away with a beautiful wrought medal to start their own collections off. Such distinction was not easily won, for as the rector said in 1578, "you will have to sweat, and in the midnight oil; here is no room for sloth and idleness; this is the place for work and for crucial decisions". And he knows he was speaking the truth.

Much midnight oil has been plied to the making of this book. Dr. Stopp's lucubrations over many a year and his peregrinations in search of the places can only be imagined; but the tales of scholars of the great age of Dr. Stopp have understood his quest and its purpose intuitively, and applauded his marvellous scholarship.

One is left with some intriguing

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brow" is a shame, for if it did, Mr and Mrs Morris might have more clearly discovered what they were about. The book's middlebrow character is evident from the composition of the panel that helped make it a newspaper, reporters, scientists, writers, political cartoonists, television personalities, novelists, professors, and poets. Odd couples abound: Saul Bellow and Harry Goldstein, W. H. Auden and Ari Buchwald, Stanley Kunitz and William O. Douglas, Wright Morris and Erich Segal. Two father-and-son teams were recruited: the Plimptons, Frances T. P. and George, and the Prescotts, Orville and Peter S. Mr and Mrs Morris feel that they have gathered together the "foremost writers" for their panel; as compilers of a book on usage they ought to be held responsible for knowing that foremost does not necessarily mean best.

I spoke about above the *Harper Dictionary of Contemporary Usage* lacking courage of opinion, and I should now like to illustrate what I meant. The book's entry "ghetto slum" provides an example. "Ghetto," the Morris writes, "is a widely used euphemism for the poverty-stricken slums where people, usually black, are forced to live because of social or economic pressures—or both." They go on to say that the word is really a misnomer, for some of the early European ghettos were populated by wealthy Jews, but add that its use as a synonym for slum is now accepted as standard by the dictionaries. Quite wrong. Ghetto is the very reverse of a euphemism—it does not soften but makes harsher the phenomenon it describes. As a label, its implication quivers with political meaning; it seeks to forge an analogy between the ghettos of eastern Europe under the Third Reich. If one believes the United States is a fascist country, comparable to Germany under the Nazis, one uses the word. If one does not believe this, one ought to despise its use, no matter how the dictionaries view it.

On the entry "life-style," which they define as "the overall pattern of one's attitudes and conduct," all that the Morris have to offer is that, along with the *New York Times*, they prefer the term in its hyphenated form. What a lovely word! "Life-style" would have been the term. Of the most dubious lineage, lifestyle was brought into the world by sociology, and is now popular with that unholiest couple of the United States, advertising. No one any longer seems to have noticed we all have lifestyles. Perhaps no other term better reflects our muddled American belief in the malleability of human character than this one. The word undergoes a change of lifestyle rather like a change of life—only, of course, earlier and more often. A change of lifestyle, advertising copywriters everywhere inform you, can be had with a change of address, wardrobe, haircut, hyphenated or alided, it is a reigning American cant term.

On the recent invasions made upon language by the new feminism, Mr and Mrs Morris take up a general line of neutrality, lean for reform. "Chairperson" gives them no difficulty, though they should think Chairperson. Mac might look upon it differently. On the touchy "Caucasian" which, for all its neutrality, is so forcibly in the TLS, remarking that it offends all who have been trained to read with an inner ear, the Morris call a panel vote, which tends to show split results: the traditional forms of address for women but 56 per cent use Mrs in correspondence, while only 19 per cent use it as a spoken form of address (pronounced Mizz).

Even how American publishers are scrambling to get on this particular bandwagon, and in a longish entry entitled "sexism" in literature, the Morris report that the United States Bureau of the Census has changed the "terms for 52 of its 44 work categories in an effort to eliminate sex stereotyping." Notable among these changes are "charwomen" to "building interior cleaners," "fishermen" to "fishers," and "busboys" to "waiters' assistants." Deploable though this is, the *Harper Dictionary of Contemporary Usage* does not deplore it, let alone laugh at it. How much better to have stated that injustices have been done to women as a group, even to have insisted that these must be redressed, but to have gone on from here to bludgeon feminist vengeance should not be taken on the language. But

the Morris, alas, wish to be on the side of the angels—the angels, in this instance, understood to be asexual.

The appearance of the *Harper Dictionary of Contemporary Usage* is doubly to be regretted: first, because there is a Gresham's Law at work in American publishing, with bad books driving out good, and second, because it represents a sadly missed opportunity. A writer of sensibility, talent, courage, and character has never been more needed than at present to close the linguistic sluice-gates, which, too long open, have resulted in much verbal garbage spilling out into the streets. One must step very gingerly to avoid the droppings left by advertising agencies, the media, and the social sciences, particularly psychology. In some American cities, to give some notion of how far things have gone, garbagemen are now known as "solid waste ecologists." The country stinks sorely in need of a verbal waste ecologist.

Although semi-literacy is not at the heart of the problem, it is surely part of it. In American schools, where composition is taught at all, usage and grammar are no longer featured; grammar only self-expression is, which is rather like teaching abstract expressionism without first taking up draughtsmanship (or should one say draughts-ness?). As a sometime university teacher, I set myself the following sentence: "Hopefully, the professor will not be altogether disinterested in the work upon which I am presently engaged, which is, in my opinion, with this sentence. I ask what is wrong with this sentence. I call on a student. Pressed, he suggests that a comma is out of place. I call on another. Shouldn't there be a comma at 'which'?" she suggests. Sometimes a student will recognize that presently does not mean currently, and sometimes another will say that a thing is either unique or it isn't, no rather about it. But no student ever cites hope-fully or remarks that disinterested is not synonymous with uninterested. It is a cruel exercise.

The Morris take a poll of their panel on the words "redundant" and "disinterested," and the responses tend, predictably, towards the furious. One of the panellists, the novelist Jean Stafford, who over the years has become attractively crankish on the subject of usage, has had a sign made and placed over her back door that reads: "Hope-fully" must not be misused on these premises. Another of the panellists, the poet, Robert Lowell, who is fully "stupid but useful," hopes yet another approves of it, saying that "the adverb makes a kind of general unspecific yearning that responds to a kind of rhetorical, this last less subtle, way that the misused 'hopefully' has come to function is as a secular substitute for the expression 'God willing' and means of appeasing God, or at least warding off the furies. The impulse to do this apparently continues, but in place of religion we now have had religion."

The panel's feeling against disinterested, between disinterested and uninterested, is even stronger: an even greater percentage appoints the failure to be distinguished from disinterested, the misuse of hope-fully. "This is one of the worst of all American solecisms," says Anthony Burgess, "and it makes me boil." Writing under a lower name, Lionel Trilling, remarks: "It is very hard, without the word, we can't have the thing. True enough, except that it is debatable which has happened first: the word or the thing. Certainly it is difficult to become angry with students who do not know the traditional meaning of disinterested. How can they know it when in their lives they probably have not seen it?"

The *Harper Dictionary of Contemporary Usage* might have been a more useful book if its authors had made a more explicit recognition of the misuse of language. While usage and semi-literacy, a good deal more procedure of two human needs: the need to deceive oneself and the need to deceive others. The great sadness of illiteracy and semi-literacy is not that they result in inelegance and social awkwardness in this collection. Sir Ernest Gowers has said that one of the

best justifications for writing grammatically is that not to do so is to risk offending the educated—but that they atrophy the critical ability to see through others' and one's own deceptions.

On the deceptions of others Orwell, in 1984 and in "Politics and the English Language," is still the best guide. (What grist the language of the perpetrators of the Watergate affair would have made for his powerful mill.) But a fine, sometimes an invisible, line can separate instances of misusage intended to deceive oneself and those intended to deceive others. When a writer of anti-technological tendency, having completed the standard attack portion of his essay and arrived at that portion where he must fashion a programme of positive action, writes that we must strive for "creative associations with our environment," is he deceiving himself or his readers? (I have phrased a good bit about this phrase, and the only creative association with my environment I can think of is to die, be buried, and so let my cadaver serve as compost to enrich the soil.) My suspicion here is that the writer is deceiving both his readers and himself.

Or take the word "establishment," of which the *Harper's Dictionary of Contemporary Usage* offers the following bare-bones entry: "... used by young people to denote the sum total of all established social institutions of the country, and especially the people who run them." I myself should rather see a boy that his parents than the establishment, but one must not marvel at the energies of self-deception this word loosed in the United States during the 1960s. If I have said such a thing as an establishment it could not have done better than to spring such a label

upon the world, diffusing and dissipating with a single word the loathing against it.

But the gold medal for pollution of language in our time, both in its use for deceiving oneself and for deceiving others, goes to modern psychology and its allied therapeutic arts. The gibberish of psychoanalysis retains its hold, "latency," "syndrome," "identity crisis," and "paranoia" long having been common parlance, though at last there has begun to be some recognition that the Oedipus complex may well be the result of an obsession not with one's mother but with the doctrine of Sigmund Freud. Elsewhere it is worse. "Consciousness raising" does not, in most quarters, cause even the raising of an eyebrow. Selfhood has shown up in a posthumous poem by John Berryman. An actress interviewed in *Esquire* reports that her "support structures are intact," by which, as far as one can make out, she means she has a lover on both coasts. Life Style said to "Roller" Family reads a headline in the *New York Times*, and in the story appearing beneath it Reuben Hill, of the University of Minnesota, is quoted as saying: "The dual pattern fits nicely our ideology of equality of opportunity, full utilization of education, egalitarian ethos, and the push toward symmetry of the genders." Professor Hill is one of the great authorities on the family in America. The American family, one need scarcely add, is in trouble.

With this, to take up an admirable recent coinage of Mary Renault, let us turn to the toll. With-it expressions—such as, for example, with-it—have always been with us, but nowadays they pass off the stage very quickly, after a month or two seeming dealer than

line was heaving an empty bottle. One can, of course, run the history of the idiom—look, watch, keep a wary eye, etc.—though one will always have trouble with the "out" part. But the idiom is the idiom, and it is right that it should now be a mere matter of looking up idioms in a dictionary that excludes etymology, definition informally, and cites lavishly from documents, articles and so on—that illustrate

usage. A. P. Cowie and R. Mackin are both experts in the teaching of English as a second language, and they impel us to compile two exhaustive volumes of English idioms. The need to get foreigners to the heart of the language, not leave them in that border region where English can all too easily become something else. Here is an example of how their dictionary works:

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I have left out their cross-reference symbols (the work is a masterpiece of cross-reference). PM refers the user to William Golding's *Pincher Martin*. I do not apologize for going straight to a "taboo" idiom, since such phrases are the ultimate untranslatables and the heart of a language. Messrs Cowie and Mackin are very good on other "arse about" or an expression I once heard Dirk Bogarde use in a British film on American television.

So-called baby English was the language of the young, they taught should not let the baby out of the Roman Empire, down. Ironically it was only when the empire was dying and America began to fill the vacuum left by the departing British, that true idiomatic English began to be taught in such colonial pockets as were left. In the 1950s, when I was a teacher in Malaya and Borneo, I was grateful for the manuals of the teaching of English as a second language that came from such centres of research as Ann Arbor in Michigan. I and others, taught structures, not Latin idiom without being constrained to show how idiom was used, of course, had always been a trouble with idiom: it did not yield to analysis. You must take it or leave it, but you had better take it. The story is told of a Frenchman already looking out of a railway carriage window and being told to "look out" because someone at the

out: hence it is not an idiom. If you take off Churchill and do a take-off. You can keep a wary eye, but not a wop. But happens if I write a novel and of Robert's draw-out as being a failure to pay his debts? It is not English. There are no idiom metaphors, rules, there is what these lexicographers rightly regard as important—

This is an important compilation and a lot of work: thinking as a compiler—has gone into it. It is a volume with a deal of idiom that do not belong to a verb-preposition-particle clause, ought to point out, though, that first volume is not so morphologically restrictive as its subtitle. There are some pretty idiomatic like *ring the curtain down* and *ring the bell* (Year) and *ring the bell* (Year) and *ring the bell* (Year).

My smouldering eye catches, deep slitting and sheaving the book's account of what you can do with idioms, stories, poems, bright marks, nothing, and that would interest Alex P. Given so much, who can come at not being given everything? The book and the price is the bud novel and a half.

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BALLET

From another world

By Gabriele Annan

LINCOLN KIRSTEIN: *Nijinsky Dancing* 177pp. Thames and Hudson. £12.50. RICHARD BUCKLE: *Nijinsky* 592pp. Penguin. £17.5. Journal de Nijinsky Translated by G. S. Solopry 277pp. Paris: Gallimard. 38fr.

The publication of Lincoln Kirstein's coffee-table-sized *Nijinsky Dancing* coincides more or less with the paperback edition of Richard Buckle's *Nijinsky*, a book which tells all one could hope to know about the great dancer and steers a tactful course through the savage controversies about his life and work, while leaving no diary or letter page untarnished. At the same time there is a new French paperback edition of Nijinsky's *Journal*, and rumours about a film starring Nureyev—a more promising piece of casting than Korda's idea in the 1930s to do it with Gielgud.

Kirstein is the founder and director of the New York City Ballet, and most of the photographs in his book come from the Dance Collection of the New York City Library at the Lincoln Center. Some of them (I believe) have never appeared in a book before: now they make their debut in a luscious production. There is a lot of interpretative text under chapter headings from *Things That Go For Nijinsky* but Mr Kirstein disarms the criticism that springs to mind by admitting that when he showed his manuscript to Madame Rambert she thought it too metaphysical, "but for her, this printed product might have been even more pretentious".

The story of Nijinsky and Diaghilev—a tragic version of the Pygmalion motif—has become one of the modern myths, like the stories of Oscar Wilde, Lindbergh, and Marilyn Monroe. But the legend of Nijinsky had begun before the Nijinsky story even reached its climax. People who had never seen him and cared nothing about dancing "knew" certain things about him: he could jump higher than anyone else in the world; he was unspeakably debauched; he could pause motionless in the air at the top of a leap before coming down; it was even said that he had bird bones in his neck instead of human ones. Such tales indicate neither admiration for a great artist nor gossip curiosity about a sex or success symbol but the kind of superstitions curiously accorded to an abnormal phenomenon, a freak of nature.

Nijinsky was odd. Far from beautiful, on some of the photographs he strikes one as almost deformed, with very short, heavy legs, a disproportionately long, thick neck, and a tiny head. He can look radiantly handsome, as the pages in *Pavillon d'Armide*, for instance, and that would interest Alex P. Given so much, who can come at not being given everything? The book and the price is the bud novel and a half.

Diaghilev the wizard touched him with his magic wand. The guile of a plain, unpossessing boy fell off—a creature exotic, feline, elfin completely eclipsed the respectable comeliness, the dignified commonplace of conventional virility.

Richard Buckle has added a passage to the new edition of his book in which he explains why it was that a new category of male dancer and a new repertoire had to be invented for Nijinsky. He starts from the classifications of Novera, the great eighteenth-century ballet

a toad that has not quite turned into a prince, with limp points clinging to bulging, overdeveloped muscles and flapping like ratchets ears on either side of his face. The face is unusual too: in the West it was considered typically Slav, but his fellow pupils at the Imperial Ballet School in St Petersburg did not see it that way: they called him Jap because of his excessively slanting eyes.

He did not communicate with the other students or with anyone. And it was not just that he was inarticulate (though he was that, as Diaghilev's dancers were to discover later when he rehearsed them intently for his own ballets without being able to get across what he wanted); he was solitary, withdrawn, and his academic intelligence was well below average. He was ready to graduate as a dancer long before he had finished the ordinary school curriculum. Lydia Sokolova, an English member of the Diaghilev company, described him well.

Nijinsky was himself like a faun—a wild creature who had been trapped by society and was always ill at ease. When addressed, he turned his head furtively, looking as if he might suddenly butt you in the stomach. He moved on the balls of his feet, and his nervous energy found an outlet in fidgeting: when he sat down he twisted his fingers or played with his shoes. He hardly spoke to anyone and seemed to exist on a different plane. Before dancing he was even more withdrawn, a bewitched soul.

The most sophisticated balletomanes stressed his strangeness—he danced like a panther, a hare, a cat, a serpent, certainly not like a man; yet "not altogether effeminate", wrote Cyril Beaumont:

Always he appeared to be of a race apart, of another essence than ourselves, an impression heightened by his partiality for unusual roles, which were either animal-like, mythological or unreal. On the stage he seemed surrounded by an invisible yet susceptible halo. Had Oberon lightly touched him with his magic wand at birth?

It was not Oberon, it was Diaghilev in his autobiography *Kuragan* (using the same words as Mr Beaumont) recorded that although every one at the Marius Theatre realized that Nijinsky was gifted with an exceptional technique, they did not think much of his personality, until

Diaghilev the wizard touched him with his magic wand. The guile of a plain, unpossessing boy fell off—a creature exotic, feline, elfin completely eclipsed the respectable comeliness, the dignified commonplace of conventional virility.

Richard Buckle has added a passage to the new edition of his book in which he explains why it was that a new category of male dancer and a new repertoire had to be invented for Nijinsky. He starts from the classifications of Novera, the great eighteenth-century ballet



Nijinsky in Pavillon d'Armide, 1909; his first appearance in Paris.

master, who divided male dancers into two types: *farjetté* and *arqué* ("knock-kneed" and "bow-legged" in Mr Buckle's terrible translation). The *farjetté* dancer is tall and elegant, his strength lies in his line; the *arqué* dancer is short and bouncy, his strength is his strength, his speed and elevation. He may move more interestingly, but he cannot aspire to the leading roles (usually princes) of classical ballet which require a noble presence and height to partner the ballerina. Nijinsky was obviously the *arqué* type, but he

had a quality of grace and flow and style which enabled him to break out of the category which his physique had indicated for him. This was partly because of his long neck, partly because of his superb St Petersburg training, and partly because of his personal magic which is ultimately inexplicable.

Edwin Denby, in an essay written in 1943 that forms an appendix to Mr Kirstein's book, moves into even closer focus to explain Nijinsky's special quality. He extracts from the photographs information which a less perceptive, less schooled eye (he is a former dancer) might miss:

When Nijinsky moves, he does not blur the centre of weight in his action. One can follow its course clearly as it floats about the stage, occurs when the soul—its *matrice*—is not in the centre of gravity but somewhere else in the body. Look at Miss P. her soul is in her spine while she plays Daphne and twirls round (unnaturally) like a Bernini statue, and young F. as Paris, his soul in his elbow when he hands the apple to Venus. It is a terrible sight. After the argument continues, comes from self-consciousness, from knowledge

of what one is doing. Purely and grace were lost when Adam ate the apple of knowledge; now only animals have it and puppets, because they have no mind.

If there is something in this theory and if Mr Denby is correct in his observation of Nijinsky, then he must have had some prelapsarian, mindless innocence about him; not only Miss Sokolova was struck by it, but many other people who met him, including Lady Ottoline Morrell to whom he appeared as "a visitor from another world". Nijinsky gave her a photograph of himself as Petrouchka, saying that this puppet was "the mythical outcast in whom is concentrated the pathos and suffering of life, one who beats his hands against the walls but is at all times chained and despaired and left outside alone". That can't have been quite how he put it, because she says "he didn't speak English and his French was very vague—but one can see why she would have been quick to interpret whatever he did say along those lines. She wondered whether the Russian Petrouchka myth was "the same myth Dostoevsky turned into *The Idiot*". The innocent, the child, the own of God, Petrouchka, Dostoevsky's Idiot: Nijinsky seems to embody all these archetypal figures and it is almost unbearably poignant when his wife in her biography of him describes how in St. Moritz, at the onset of his schizophrenic illness, he used to play all the village children—as Prince Myshkin did in his Swiss village.

Still, Nijinsky was a conscious artist and when he came to compose his own ballets he tried to put into practice the principles about dancing that Kleist expounded: he wanted every movement reduced to its bare essentials, without decorative embellishments or what he called "le jol". Once he picked on a nymph in *L'Après-Midi d'un Faune*, for putting on a frightened expression when the faun came towards her: "It's all in the choreography," he said.

What the choreography was really like is hard to assess now. Of the four ballets he composed, only one—*L'Après-Midi*—remains in any repertoire, and even that has been largely superseded by the Jerome Robbins version. The first night of *Le Sacre du Printemps* was one of the great artistic scandals, comparable to the first night of *Harmont* and the first impressionist exhibition. Mr Kirstein reprints the essay Jacques Rivière wrote about it at the time (1913), in a translation by Miriam Lassmann. "Those who have read it in the opaque original will recognize the extraordinary skill of her transparent interpretation," he says. It is still pretty heavy going—almost as heavy as Nijinsky's choreography. The Diaghilev company performed his version only a few times and then threw themselves with relief and gusto into Massine's which was also more to the liking of Stravinsky himself. The composer had been deeply uneasy about Nijinsky's work and felt that those who professed themselves moved by it might be more motivated by avant-garde culture snobbery. Still, *Nijinsky Dancing* is about Nijinsky dancing, and the photographs, familiar and unfamiliar, are a terrible sight. After the magic and mystery that everyone went on about so much,

"On the Puppet Theatre" where dancing is used as an analogy for all the performing arts.

The essay begins charmingly with the author walking in the public gardens of the town of M. where he meets Herr C, the premier danseur at the opera. Kleist says he has frequently noticed Herr C watching the puppet theatre in the marketplace—surely a spectacle fit only for the hot police. Not at all, says Herr C: the puppets are more graceful than any human dancer could be, and that is because each puppet is directed by one string only, attached to its centre of gravity, and the limbs follow automatically, working like pendulums. (Denby attributes the strength and expression in Nijinsky's arms to the fact that they are pivoted, not lifted from the shoulders.) Even if the puppet moves in a straight line, the limbs describe curves, so that a rhythm is established. It is really very simple, says Herr C, but at the same time very mysterious, because the path of the puppet's centre of gravity is the path of its soul: in other words, the puppeteer has to think himself into the puppet's centre of gravity.

What advantage have these puppets over the human dancer? asks Kleist. There are three: first, they are free from affectation, says Herr C, because they are incapable of it. Affectation occurs when the soul—its *matrice*—is not in the centre of gravity but somewhere else in the body. Look at Miss P. her soul is in her spine while she plays Daphne and twirls round (unnaturally) like a Bernini statue, and young F. as Paris, his soul in his elbow when he hands the apple to Venus. It is a terrible sight. After the argument continues, comes from self-consciousness, from knowledge

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Erich, or little by little

By Jean-Loup Bourget

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The *Principia* in the making

By John North

the author has here been frank with his readers in unpleasant duty as to explain this mystery. Last Dr Levy, who had been appointed by J. E. R. research director of the for Parapsychology of the North Carolina, was caught his data by Mr Davis and colleagues. He was, of promptly dismissed.

kindly published a statement
 that judgment should be made. T. WHITESIDE (Editor) :
 concerning the validity of the Mathematical Papers of Isaac
 Newton, in which Dr. LeNewton
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 has simply substituted the WILLING (Editors) :
 Davis for that of Levy. The Correspondence of Isaac
 Newton is at all times a pitiful
 considerable field : it will not be Volume 5
 by authors who, however auth-
 or the well-known, relax (14pp. Cambridge University Press.
 highest standards of respect, 20,
 regarding.

Counter-Reformation science

HOWARD B. ADELMANN (Editor) :
The Correspondence of Marcello
Malpighi
5 Volumes
2227pp. Cornell University Press.
£50.

Marcello Malpighi (1628-1694) stands at the very end of Italian supremacy in the sciences. From his influence the new Arabic and Greek learning in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries until the end of the seventeenth century, Italy had a central - perhaps even dominant - position in European science. The reasons why science declined in Italy in the late seventeenth century are manifold and complex. The usual assumption that repression by the Church was responsible will not do. W. E. B. Midwinter has recently shown in convincing fashion. Regardless of

why science ultimately declined in Italy, these letters of Malpighi's clearly show that scientific research and study could be maintained at a high level at the very height of the power of the Counter-Reformation.

Malpighi's letters reveal him to have concentrated his interests and efforts on a rather narrow band of subjects within the biological sciences. Though his contributions to knowledge cover a spectrum of specialized subjects, we do not find the diversity of interests which characterized the work of his close friend Giovanni Alfonso Borelli, for example, or does Malpighi's correspondence show the richness of subject-matter to be found in that of Marin Mersenne. Not only is there a very distinct focus on biological and medical science to the exclusion of physics, mathematics, astronomy, but there is little on classical or contemporary literature, philosophy, or, in general, on that vast range of subjects which engaged the *respublica literaria* of seventeenth century. Malpighi emerges as a specialist, a letter-writer, as he emerges from his published work as a consummate seeker after natural knowledge, based predominantly on careful observation and experiment on biological organisms. In his day-to-day researches repeatedly, Malpighi is a letter-writer in the pissinges between him and his clerical labourers in the field of the empirical biomedical sciences.

The letters have a certain narrowness of subject-matter and, also, relatively few of them went beyond the confines of Italy. The portion of the correspondence with people abroad is less than that of the seventeenth-century Italian medical figures such as Marcellino Severino or Giorgio Baglivi. This is strange in a way, for Malpighi's abstruse work had a much greater impact abroad than did that of the other two. His correspondence with foreign contacts was with the Royal Society and the letters exchanged with Oldenburg amply illustrate this. In fact, from the time of Oldenburg's first letter to him in 1667 until his death, Malpighi maintained a remarkably fruitful contact with the Royal Society. In 1669 he was elected to membership and all of his later publications were printed in London under the auspices of the Royal Society, in addition to sending his work abroad.

Similar considerations apply to the term "directly perceive", which receives progressively more refined definition. We are told initially that the refinements do not affect what is perceived, but only how it is directly perceived something if and only if he perceives it and it would be false that he directly perceived it. The refinements seem to experience something different from it. The "only if" seems to me to raise a number of questions, but at any case, is it to experience something? Professor Feys says that he uses the term to cover modes of awareness. All? And if not, can the term be explained in a way that does not involve circularity? "Sensing" is a term which is used problematically, and no attempt is made to see how the differences between the senses and any special problems in these respect.

A few years ago many philosophers would have been considerably more careful about such matters. Professor Corman's approach is not untypical of that of many contemporary philosophers.

Not only is it "thin," excessive rigour is also a great danger. In certain casualness in the attempt to get to grips with the relevant concepts. Philosophy of this kind was inspired by Wittgenstein, is perhaps, unfortunately, on the decline. It is significant that Wittgenstein, somewhere mentioned among the very few notable number of philosophers who do receive mention in this book.

I think that many will look on *Perception, Common Sense and Science* as an impressive piece of philosophical argument. So it is in a way, but there will be some who, perhaps rightly, see the rigorous body of argument as hollow. Of one thing there is no doubt—the task of following through the complete argument of the book is a very difficult one. It is no book for the layman. This is a highly polished piece of work, whether or not it approves of the way in which the profession goes about its work.

In 1858 the streets of Grantham where Newton was at school were crowded by "persons to whom the word 'respectable' in all its peculiarly English signification could be properly applied", all out to celebrate the unveiling of the statue of the great philosopher. The school was thronged by a sympathising audience seated on the benches of the market place. The platform which had been most appropriately divided into compartments as one might hope, and some of the more than 100 orators gave the first of several lengthy orations. The shortest was by the master of Grantham School, "We are," he said, "like those golden argosies, of which the weight of their precious burden, and tottering on the port." One wonders whether he saw the ambiguity. At all events, he was determined not to touch on the stupendous theme, adding, "The ingenious poet, who sang the praises of Newton, contracted his thoughts within two nervous lines. Let us imitate his brevity."

Grantham, it seems, was for that day rather accurate mirror of the way the English have tended to treat Newton. There have been

the poor Italian, and the monstrous and often symptomatic he over us, who justly corporate pride than of any his- having the help of printers' urge. There have been he is helped by a great numerous occasions on which "two are lured up and modervous lines" was much as the four-soulters when we mathematician had the courage or the lect three, ruck up and down to the water in the plants. The more it all, there have always been a notable sum in pounds the few capable of giving informed is spent for the benefit exegesis, and not always within an Royal Society, and here artless historical frame. From small letters deprive their beginnings, mostly having to do with the stomachs of food to buy the tradition of scholarship has come pen and ink. The full maturity in two great Newton Among the cultural her- bures of recent years, *The Math-* of Muphiat which once in *Mathematical Papers*, edited by D.T. utters is a hobby of Whiteside who some assistance models, something he should A Book of A. Pogg- Francesco Redi, one of the *The Correspondence* no- famous scientists of interest by A. R. Hall and Laura also alive during his last *Philosophy*. The first volume of the Several of an interest mathematical papers appeared in unvases by the Carracci, *The Correspondence* appears as long and, especially, Guido Redi, as 1959. The first volume there is little evidence of volumes were edited by H. W. Turner- traditional literary pursuit and the fourth by J. F. Scott- to time we see evidence in two editions are produced by the first time we get the Cambridge University Press in anything is paid. One format. Since there are significant written to Lorenzini, all the volumes of the Whiteside edi-

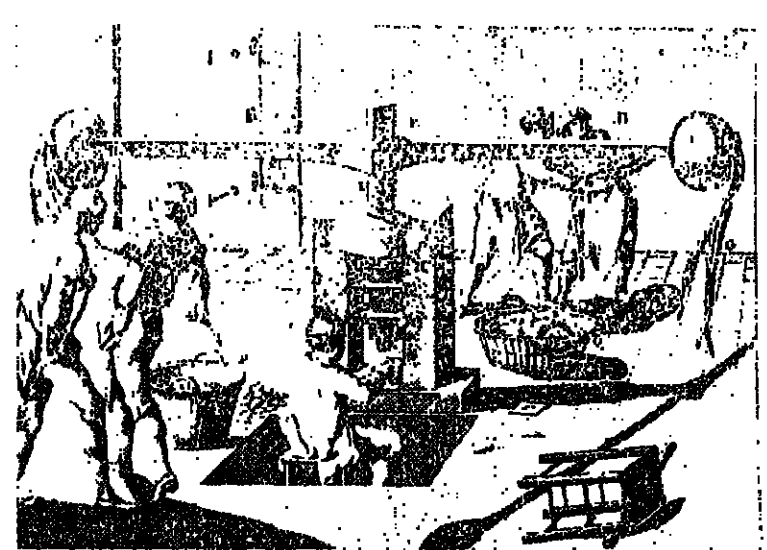
the form of a "discovery" to come, and since the correspondence between the two men has now reached beyond the point of a "discovery," the two great men have now become a *discovery*. Adelman comments that these two great men, now, however, this is not at last beginning to look secure. The burlesque allegory of Volume 5 of the *Mathematical Philosophy* shows Sharpley's *papers* left Newton in the summer of 1687, which in 1694, working on a variety of subjects, including (and chemical) topics. Sharpley tells us that in a now famous passage, how in that year he and Hooke had met and discussed how to determine the law of motion from which the known laws of motion (essentially Kepler's) could be derived. Sharpley has rightly decided or proved there law of attraction, which Hooke indeed said he could prove. When the word was needed. When Sharpley's word, and wagered a thirty-shilling bet. (Sharpley's bet reminds Newton, he found a visit to Cambridge "the good thing that you had brought this was not to perfection." The problem was not to know the problem was reworked (in that it was not using Hooke's method of playing for time), and Newton consumed in the process with Sharpley's old friend. In the mechanics of material bodies. The

was a subject on which he and Hooke had corresponded some years previously, and a subject in which he at first owed more to Descartes than (as was supposed) to Boyle. Whiteside drastically revised the accepted picture) to Kepler and Galileo. For long he had believed in the Cartesian vortices. There is little doubt, however, that the correspondence with Hooke was the catalyst Newton needed, even though Hooke's pretentious claims to the inverse square law later caused Newton to reject virtually any association with Hooke's ideas.

It was Newton's renewal of interest in dynamics which led, within three years, to the publication of his greatest work, *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica*. Since this work is the centre of attraction around which all Newtonian scholarship tends to revolve, whether knowingly or otherwise, any study of its genesis is doubly important. The *Principia* and the *Mathematical Papers* contain what is essentially the product of Newton's mathematical pen between Halley's visit and the appearance of *Principia*. It begins with the famous *De motu corporum*¹ (expertly translated into most of the Latin works, *en face*), a work which was first published by J. W. Herivel in 1966. Here Newton gets down to business quickly, and sets out a minimum of axiomatic support for proving that "all the bodies describe, by 'radial' drawn to their centre, areas proportional to their times". (The force is central, but otherwise of more or less arbitrary law.) After the *Principia* has been written, the moves he arrives at a model for planetary movement under the standard Newtonian inverse square law, and from it proves Kepler's third law. He ends the treatise with a brilliant study of the motion of a body resisted in proportion to its speed.

Edward Paget took a copy of the short tract to London in November 1684, where Halley transcribed it before taking another journey to Cambridge. He arrived to find Newton hard at work on an enlargement of his manuscript on the subject, the treatise grew and divided and grew, until it had become the tripartite *Principia*, published as Halley's expense in 1687. The first enlargement of the initial tract is clearly recognizable as the direct ancestor of the *Principia*. (It was first published in 1621 by Thomas Digges and again by J. W. Herivel, with whose treatment of the text Dr Whiteside takes issue, however.) It opens in much the same way as the *Principia* with recognition that the laws of motion. The interdependence of the works has been explored in I. B. Cohen's recent *Introduction to Newton's PRINCIPIA*. The revision of the first tract extends the potential planetary movements to hyperbolic orbits, and the laws of motion among many other deep mathematical insights a proof that uniform spherical mass may be treated for his purposes as a point mass.

The third item in the sixth volume of the *Mathematical Papers* is the ensuing revision, "Superior pri-
ority," which can be superficially equated to the corresponding passage of *Principia*, and which takes up well over twice as many pages as Dr Whorlside's edition, where it is of course fully annotated and multiplied by the usual number of foot-
notes. The review can possibly convey the richness of those modern annotations; and lest any mathematician reader wish to test Newton's mettle, and try his hand at annotation, I have here a Lemma XXII.
"There exists an *ovva* figure, whose area cut off at will by straight lines, might generally be found by means of equations finite in the number of terms, terms of which are all of the same degree." The words "ovva" were struck out at all along of the con-
cessations Newton made to his reader, who was expected to have little be-
yond the elements of Euclid and Apollonius, and a smattering of the algebra of the day. The hand of Newton himself through his own analytical methods, proved ab initio.
The myth that Newton was par-
ticularly obscure is one which Dr Whorlside is slow to explode; and that the scholar perhaps "most



The great screw press of the Mint, as illustrated in the Encyclopédie, Paris 1771. Newton's correspondence as Warden of the Mint gives a detailed picture of the wide range of his interests and occupations.

familiar with Newton's manuscript drafts and worksheets we can accept this judgment. Inevitably, Newton ventured into problems for which his mathematical techniques were not adequate. Virtually all the documents in the MSS. 2A.9.1.1 show the valiant struggle with the inequalities of the Moon's motion (as deriving from gravitational perturbations) is now judiciously assembled in one place, with three examples, so that Newton's strength can be more plainly seen in his sleight of hand. Of the theory of the Moon, Newton is purported to have said to Halley, "it has broke my reast so often I will think of it no more" and, for twenty years after Newton's death, were better solutions to be found.

Newton's neat (but often much corrected) manuscripts, finely illustrated at intervals throughout Dr Whiteside's edition, present a different problem from that inherited by Professor Hall and Dr Tilling from J. P. Scott. At Dr Scott's death the roughly assembled materials for Volume 5 of *The Correspondence* had to be so problematically arranged in their way to the original in which they were based. Many of these, in turn, survive in multiple drafts, and some of them Newton might never have dispatched. Several of the letters relate to the routine business of the Mint, and provide us with an insight into the somewhat humdrum life of Newton as a public servant, while the earnings gave him many headaches as the Moon had done years before.

The main intellectual interest of the period 1709-13 lies, however, in the fact that these were the years during which Newton, with Roger Cotes's help, was devising the *Principia* and seeing it through the press. Considered as a single group of letters, the Newton-Cotes correspondence (as its editors explain in their introduction) was

the largest and most important section of Newton's scientific correspondence that we have; nowhere else can one witness Newton in a detailed debate about scientific method and scientific conclusions—a debate from which he did not always emerge victorious. Nowhere else does Newton write in detail about the text of the *Principia*. And all the world knows that this text which was hammered out between Cotes and Newton was the most important of all the versions, printed and unprinted; this was (to all intents and purposes) the *Principia* of subsequent history.

Newton was fortunate in having Cotes as his editor, for—as the correspondence shows—Cotes worked systematically through the proofs, drew attention to what others had done or tried to do in the same connection, sometimes overrode Newton's wishes, and handled relations with the printer. (A full account of Bentley's patron-

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The resulting essay was, until recently looked upon as the fullest statement of Newton's views on natural philosophy. It remains essential reading for anyone who wishes to understand the philosophical ferment of the time. Was gravily a primary cause? Did Newton rendered in an occult quality? Was it a force versus a complex of vortices? However we judge Cotes's preface, it is now clear that it is not a piece of disguised Newton. For a marvellous Newtonian riposte to Leibniz from the pen of one who have a draft of a letter to the editor of the *Memoirs of Literature*.

This draft does not cast any light on the problem of Samuel Clarke's collaboration with Newton in the composition of the "theological appendix." Schullum added to the second edition of *Principia* a problem recently raised in the letter from I. B. Cohen, October 17, 1975). The draft does, nevertheless, cover much of the same ground as the famous Leibniz-Clarke correspondence of 1701 and 1702, terminated by Leibniz's letter, printed by Clarke in 1717; Clarke is shown by one letter (presumably printed by Joseph Edleston) as having "corrected" Cotes's preface to the second edition on the nature of gravity.

Other letters in Volume 5 of *The Correspondence* touch on Royce's Society gossip and scandal, and on relations between it, Newton, and Flamsteed, the Astronomer Royal. Few signs of Newton's personal involvement in the forcible official publication (1712) of Flamsteed's observations remain in the correspondence. As Professor Hall and I have written, "the humiliating remark," the humiliation of Flamsteed, was not a misfortune that would have been avoided by pursuing a course that Newton had believed to be incumbent upon him as a loyal servant of the Crown and President of the Royal Society."

Newton had been brought to the Mint in 1696 by Halifax—whose relationship with Catherine Barton was intimate—since, as inevitably touched upon although not explicitly attributed, upon alighting upon the Mint, he always throws light where it is most needed. As to Newton's duties at the Mint, Sir John Craig's standardised account of the subject is now supplemented by a letter recently mentioned by which he proves yet again what Craig's editors call "Newton's exorbitant and highly conscientious attention to the integrity of government business and the public good." They are, however, unable to find any evidence among the Mint papers for the reputed £5,000 bribe from a copper-clad merchant to secure £10,000 annual pension which Bolingbroke is reported to have offered Newton if he would retire. The evidence, if it existed, has gone, and Newton's conduct is "maintain the dignity of history."

When Plamsted saw the corrected sheets of his catalogue he "found more faults in it, and greater," than he "imagined the publisher either could or would find." His editor, however, in whom he knew was Halley in editor, he did not know it, he was even more fortunate than Newton in Cotes. But neither Halley nor Cotes was faced with the doubly taxing duty of the scientific editor who must "make both sense and style of his materials. This task Professor Hall and Dr Tilling perform magnificently. Very rarely do they falter. (There is some slight confusion between the background to lunar theory but it is restricted to a work of 1702. "The irregularities of the Moon's Motion have been all along the just Complaint of Astronomers"). They have not only resuscitated a dormant public but they have breathed more life into than it has ever known. Misquoting Cotes's preface, one might say of their work, as of that by Dr Whiteside, that "si nunc revivisceret, Isaacus Newtonus vel simpliciter vel harmonice gratias agere non desisteret." I would not say as much for the *Gravitatione*.

Commonsense theory

JAMES W. CORNMAN:
Perception, Common Sense, and
Science
420pp, Yale University Press, £11.

James W. Cornman's new book is the best in a trilogy which includes also his *Metaphysics, Reference and Language* and *Materialism and Sensation*. The previous books have been good and useful and the present one is very similar. It is difficult to follow the course of Professor Cornman's argument, especially the frequent digressions, but, on the whole, the book is a defence of what he calls compatibilism or commonsense realism. That theory rubs shoulders with such theories as behaviorism, sense-datum mentalism, phenomenalism, instrumentalism, and the final choice turns out to be one between commonsense realism and behaviorism. The book is a compatible sense-datum mentalism. It is much more of this kind. Moreover, a good deal of the argument is directed towards showing that certain objections to a theory or set of theories do not work out so good; so that the reader who

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